

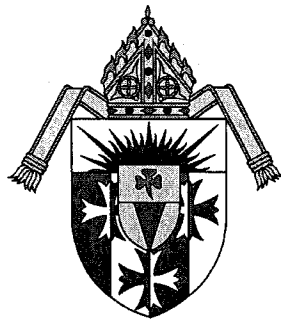
Catholic Church of Eastern Montana  
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

EXHIBIT

DATE 3/9/07

SB 306

14



March 8, 2007

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I want to address SB 306 An Act to Eliminate the Death Penalty, which is scheduled for a hearing tomorrow morning.

I want to join my voice in renewing our call to end the use of the death penalty. Catholic leaders, both bishops and laity, can offer a distinctive religious perspective on crime and punishment, responsibility and rehabilitation.

The administration of the death penalty is often seen as a major sign of some of the failings within the criminal justice system. Capital punishment is cruel, arbitrary and unnecessary in modern society. It often has racial overtones. It fails to live up to a certain standard of human decency, a decency that prompts us Catholics to hold a deep conviction that all human life is sacred. In 1998 the bishops of our country wrote: "Our witness to respect for life shines most brightly when we demand respect for each and every human life, including the lives of those who fail to show that respect for others. The antidote to violence is love, not more violence."

Another prophetic voice is that of John Paul II: "The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ... who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of every human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary."

More and more people are working to end the use of the death penalty: in their witness at prisons as people are executed, in state capitals across our land, including Helena, in courtrooms and prisons around the nation and in Congress, where efforts to abolish or limit the use of the death penalty are being debated. We support calls for a moratorium on executions and welcome the **courage of leaders** who have implemented changes or are working to address the clear failings of the death penalty. It is time to abandon the death penalty – not just because of what it does to those who are executed, but because of how it diminishes all of us. I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Very Rev. Jay H. Peterson  
Diocesan Administrator

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